
RESCUING RAVEN

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

In a land far away, nestled between green, rolling hills, there is a tiny kingdom known as Livania. The kingdom was governed by a monarchy, King George IV and his beautiful young queen, Natisha. Queen Natisha had hair the color of gold and eyes so blue they sparkled in the sunlight. The King was so enthralled by her beauty that he had courted her shamelessly until she agreed to become his wife and help him run the tiny kingdom.

Two years into the marriage, the queen learned she was with child. The entire kingdom was ecstatic upon hearing there was to be an heir to the throne. Would the baby be a son or a daughter for the royal couple? The castle's staff and the queen worked diligently to prepare a nursery that was perfect and fitting for a tiny prince or princess. A nanny was brought to the castle to look after the baby after he or she arrived. Everything was in place for the birth that was to be celebrated by the people in the kingdom. A parade was planned and parties were sure to be held in every home.

After a grueling labor for the young queen, a daughter was finally born to George and Natisha. She had hair as black as a

raven and eyes as blue as her mother's. The king was immediately in love with his baby princess, and he chose to name her Raven.

Princess Raven was cherished and loved by one and all in the kingdom of Livania. But during her third year of life, the little girl's appearance underwent a drastic change. The day after her third birthday, her long, black hair turned to a color between a light shade of blue and the color of lilacs. Her beautiful, sparkling blue eyes turned to gold. The staff was in awe of the little princess and became fearful that something was terribly, terribly wrong. Great men of medicine were brought to the castle, but no one could explain the change in the little Princess of Livania.

King George became angry, blaming his beautiful queen for producing such a child. He accused her of witchcraft and banished her from his home and kingdom. As for the child, instead of allowing her to leave Livania with her broken-hearted mother, Raven was banished to a tower on the far end of the castle. Her loving nanny cared for her, taking meals to the child and teaching her to read and write in secret. When the king was away, the child was allowed to play in the spacious courtyard, running freely through the grounds as a child ought to do. The people of the kingdom knew only that the queen was gone. It was their assumption the child had gone with her. They were sad for their king and wished for him to marry again. The staff had been sworn to secrecy concerning the child who lived in the tower. The king never visited her. Raven was growing up alone and abandoned, knowing only the love of her sweet nanny. When she inquired about her parents, she was told only that her mother had gone away, and her father was very busy running his kingdom.

Raven was a sad child, but she was also willful. She had a wild streak and was prone to tantrums. The once cherished

princess had become a forgotten member of society in the tiny kingdom.

The years went by, and one day the king received word that Natisha had died, presumably of a broken heart. He sent word that her body was to be brought back to the castle, and she was buried in the cemetery on the grounds. Raven was never told that her mother's body had been returned. She was never taken to her mother's grave to mourn.

The young princess was growing up. She passed her teen years and was nearing her twentieth year. When her nanny approached the king and asked what was to become of the beautiful young woman, she was told that her days were to be spent in the tower. The nanny was given the option of remaining with the girl or leaving the castle to return to her own life. Loving the princess as a daughter, the woman refused to leave her.

"It's a beautiful day outside, love. Would you like to go outside for a walk?" Nanny asked when she returned to the tower. She had seen the king whisked away a short time earlier for a trip out of town.

"Oh, how nice," Raven replied as she put down the book she'd been reading. After reading all the classics, she was now very much into reading romance novels. In fact, the girl read everything she could get her hands on. Nanny had encouraged her in this and gave the girl free rein over what she chose to read, bringing her books daily from the library downstairs and from the flea market in the village.

"Father is away again?" Raven asked as she and Nanny walked through the beautiful gardens.

"Yes, my dear. He's gone on a trip to meet with the kings from some of the neighboring kingdoms."

"Do you think he will ever marry again? It's been years since my mother left the castle."

"I imagine that someday he might," Nanny replied sadly. Raven and her mother could have had such a happy life, had

George not responded so harshly all those years ago. As for the king, he was a lonely and bitter man. He had loved Natisha with all his heart. The little princess had been his pride and joy. His inability to accept the changes in her had frightened him to the point that he banished them both from his life.

Raven walked through the gardens, stopping to admire the beautiful flowers. “Oh look, this one is the color of my hair.” She flipped her long, lilac-blue hair over her shoulders and smiled as she leaned over to catch a whiff of the fragrance.

“You have beautiful hair, Princess Raven,” Nanny said as she watched the young woman.

When Raven turned to her, the sun caught the glow of her golden eyes. Nanny could see how her appearance could be unsettling at first glance, but if only the king had allowed himself to know his daughter, he could have loved her for the beautiful, willful soul she was.

The women finished their walk and returned to the tower.

“I’ll see if Cook has your dinner prepared,” Nanny told her.

“I’ll just go back to my book. It’s such a lovely story, about a handsome prince and a beautiful peasant girl. They fall madly in love, and I imagine it will have the happiest of endings,” Raven said as she sat on the window seat and picked up her book.

The room in the tower had been tastefully decorated. At least the king had allowed his daughter’s isolated home to be comfortable. A canopy bed, lacy curtains, a comfortable window seat, where she could look outside or curl up to read, all graced the tower room.

Being modern times in the tiny kingdom, she had a television set, a mini kitchen for late night snacks and a spacious lavatory. There was a sitting room adjoining the massive, feminine boudoir. She had all the comforts, but no family to share it with. Nanny didn’t agree with King George that the girl should live out her days behind the walls of the castle in the comfortable tower. She felt that Raven should go out into the world and find

her own way, away from Livania and the stigma that would surely follow her there.

When she returned with the princess's favorite dinner, she sat down to join her. "Do you mind if I take my meal with you this evening?"

"Oh, please do. I love it when you share dinner with me. I get so lonely here at times. I don't understand why Father makes me stay here."

"He's a protective father," Nanny lied to spare the girl's feelings.

The two enjoyed a pleasant supper together, and when Nanny rose to take their trays to the kitchen, she bade the princess good night.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Nanny. I think I'll have a hot bath and turn in."

And that is just what the princess did. She fell asleep, dreaming about a young prince finding her and taking her away from the solitude of the tower.

The days that followed were much the same, with walks in the garden, meals in the tower and books to read and dream about.

The king returned to the castle the next week with a surprise for the staff. He introduced them to his new queen, Lydia. Queen Lydia of Livania was a tall woman, with jet-black hair and green eyes. She was pretty in her own way, but the staff reserved forming an opinion of their new queen until they could determine how she would treat them. They had loved Queen Natisha.

And there was a question hovering in each of their minds. Did Lydia know about the beautiful princess in the tower? If she did, would she be kind to her or ignore her as the king had done for all these years? It all remained to be seen.

They did not have to wait long to find out. One morning, as

Raven was going through her closet to choose her frock of the day, she was stunned by a knock on her door.

“Come in,” she said as she hurriedly pulled a silk gown up over her hips and slid her arms in the sleeves. As she turned toward the door, expecting to see Nanny with her breakfast tray, she nearly fainted when she saw her father, looking much older than when she had last seen him. He was not alone.

“Raven,” the king began as he stepped inside the room. “How are you, my dear?”

“Father, it’s good to see you,” Raven said as she went toward the man and the strange woman standing at his side.

“I want to introduce you to Lydia,” her father said bluntly. “Lydia is my new queen.”

Raven took a deep breath. So he had finally remarried. She held out her hand politely to the woman. “It’s good to meet you.”

“Oh, Raven, I’m so glad to meet you, too. I insisted your father bring me to you. It is my fervent hope that the two of us may become friends.”

Raven looked from her father to the woman. “Thank you, Father, for bringing her to me.” Turning to the new queen, she said hesitantly, “That would be nice, Queen Lydia.”

“Please, dear, call me Lydia. After all, I’m your new step-mother now.”

“Yes, I guess you are,” Raven replied warily. After all these years, her father was visiting her in the tower. Was it the influence of his new bride? Did she really want to be her friend or was she just curious about the princess hidden away in the tower?

So many questions were running through her sharp, young mind.

Nanny arrived with her breakfast tray. Shocked to see the king and queen with Raven, she took a step back. “Pardon me; I didn’t know the princess had visitors. I’ll just leave her tray.” The

woman nervously set the tray on the table and made her exit quickly.

“We’ll leave you to your breakfast. I hope you won’t mind if I stop by again for a visit, my dear,” Lydia said as the king turned to go.

“Feel free to stop by anytime,” Raven replied. “You, too, of course, Father.”

King George cleared his throat. “Yes, yes, of course. Enjoy your breakfast.”

The royal couple left her then. Raven took a sip of her juice and played the entire scene over in her head.

Seventeen years ago, her mother had fled the kingdom, for reasons unknown and never revealed to Raven. She had been banished to spend her days in the tower at the tender age of three. She had always assumed it was because her father was nursing a broken heart and couldn’t deal with running a kingdom and raising a child. He had put Nanny in charge of her. Now he had a new bride. Would things change drastically in the castle? She waited anxiously for Nanny to return as she ate her breakfast.

She didn’t have to wait long, for as soon as Nanny knew the king and queen were no longer in the tower, she hotfooted it back upstairs to her beloved Raven.

“Oh, Nanny, come in,” she said as the kindly woman entered the room. “Please sit down and chat with me.”

“Are you all right, my dear Raven?” the woman, her trusted friend asked.

“My father, he’s aged so,” she replied.

“Yes, he has. Queen Lydia has been kind to the staff, and I understand it was she who convinced him to visit you this morning.”

“Why does he hate me so?” Raven asked with tears in her eyes.

“He doesn’t hate you, my dear sweet girl. I believe he is frightened of you.”

“Why would he be frightened of me?” she asked.

Nanny took a deep breath. “It’s time you knew the truth. When you were born, your father loved you with all his heart. He doted on his baby princess. He and your mother, Queen Natisha, were very much in love. But when you were three years old, your appearance changed drastically. Your hair and your eyes changed to the color they are now. He had never seen anything like it, none of us had. He blamed your dear mother, calling her a witch, banishing her from his life. She left, broken-hearted. After that, he had the tower made ready for you and sent you here to stay. I was asked to care for you.”

“He thinks my mother was a witch?” Raven asked in disbelief. “So she didn’t leave because she wanted to?”

“Your mother passed away, and she is buried on the grounds. Your father had her returned here when he heard the news. I don’t think he ever got over losing her, and I believe he regretted his hasty decision. I’ll take you to her.”

Raven was reeling from the news. “My mother is dead.”

“I’m afraid so, my dear.”

The tears began to fall, and Nanny comforted her as best she could. Together, the two of them quietly walked down the stairs and out the rear door of the castle. Nanny took her to the cemetery where her mother’s remains were buried. As the young girl knelt at her mother’s grave, she wept. “Mama, I’ll never forget you.”

When she got up later, she turned to Nanny and said, “I’m ready to go.”

Safe and sound back in her tower home, Raven collapsed on her bed. “I’d like to be alone if you don’t mind. I’ll speak to you later. Thank you, Nanny.”

“Whatever you wish, my dear. I’ll bring your lunch to you in

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a little while.” Nanny left her alone to ponder what she had learned and to grieve for the mother that was lost to her forever.

Raven was still in shock at hearing the circumstances behind her mother’s disappearance and her banishment to the tower. As she walked to the mirror and touched her long hair, she sighed.

What is so wrong with me?